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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP

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SUBJECT: ELECTION UPDATE: TENTS, BLACKSMITHS, FLAT SCREEN TVS AND CHOCOLATE IN DEMAND IN THE RUN-UP TO ELECTION DAY

Ref. Kuwait 2148

¶1. (U) Summary: Preparations for Kuwait's June 29 parliamentary elections are proving to be an economic windfall for the country's catering services, tent suppliers, flat screen television vendors, print shops, and blacksmiths as 386 candidates, including 31 women, splurge on these and other offerings in an effort to lure voters to their campaign tents in the hopes of securing victory on election day. End summary.

¶2. (U) Campaign season is in full swing in Kuwait as evidenced by the colorful array of banners, posters and large tents blanketing the country's 25 electoral districts. A total 386 candidates, including 31 women, are registered for the election. The large majority are promoting themselves through the use of elaborate billboards, street-side posters, brochures, websites, SMS messages, ribbons, t-shirts, and chocolate wrappers with imprinted logos. The resulting political flurry of activity in anticipation of the June 29 election has led to increased demand (and a price surge) for these and other services. Kuwaiti electoral campaigning offers a unique mix of traditional Arabian hospitality, age-old politicking, and modern technology with varying degrees of marketing appeal. Candidates are expending manpower and resources on outdoor seating areas, tents, elaborate buffets and large plasma screen televisions (for World Cup matches) to cater to the needs of potential voters.

¶3. (U) The two major services that have experienced the largest price increase are tents and meat vendors. A reasonably sized tent (300 person capacity) currently costs about \$17,000, up from \$10,000. Meat products (a key ingredient of Kuwaiti cuisine), particularly sheep, have increased 25%, now costing \$200 each. Catering companies are also doing brisk business offering their services to the numerous campaign tents for several hours in the evening. (Note: Most campaign tents remain open from 8:30pm until after midnight. End note.)

¶4. (U) The rising cost of printing promotional materials is another election-driven phenomenon. According to local vendors, the cost per square meter of a banner ranges from \$10-\$19. One thousand posters cost \$300-\$550; 1000 stickers cost \$150-\$500 USD; 1000 badges are priced at \$600; and t-shirts cost approximately \$4 each. The demand for blacksmiths is also on the rise due to the amount of metal pegs needed to secure sign boards on the ground. TV sales are also increasing and the anticipated World Cup season will draw eager fans to election tents, many of which will preview the matches.

¶5. (U) However, the country's travel and commercial shopping sectors are experiencing temporary setbacks as many Kuwaitis are foregoing ongoing sales (as high as 75%) and either postponing or canceling summer vacation plans in anticipation of the election. With election results expected to be announced 24-48 hours after polling stations close, election victory celebrations are expected to last until mid-July.

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